

Sahaj

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SAHAJ in Sikh vocabulary, refers to **a state of mental and spiritual equipoise** without the least intrusion of ego; unshaken natural and effortless serenity attained through spiritual discipline. Ego (aham or haumai) develops out of the undifferentiated primordial being as a result of the socio-cultural conditioning factors that generate as a result of a process of individuation. Ego is thus a mere psychic substantive, a myth that not only begins to shroud the primordial nature of the human soul, but also is responsible for all kinds of emotional and volitional disturbances. When this ego is quelled, and one resides once again in the innate undisturbed, effortless state of the soul, sahaj is said to have been attained. Although called a state (avastha), in fact it transcends all states, for it is a return to the soul as it was before 'states' differentiated or derived from it.

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The word sahaj is derived from Sanskrit twin roots: saha, together, and ja, born. Thus, it means born together (with oneself), hence innate. It signifies innate nature, or one's natural spontaneous self shorn of all external conditioning influences that cramp the soul. Sahaj is, thus, renascent freedom or liberation of the soul.

The term has a long history. The basic concept came from the leftist Tantric cults in whose vocabulary sahaj signified a protest against the formalism of orthodox religion. They decried the bondage of artificial conventions and affirmed the non-transgression of the natural. Sahaj was, thus, the basic tenet of the Indian antinomianism. The Sahajyana Buddhists, Natha Yogis, and Sahajiya Saivites, all in their own time and in their specific way, emphasized the cultivation of sahaj, but they were all in a sense Tantric in outlook, for the *raison d'être* of these schools with the solitary exception of the Nathapanthis was to be found in particular sexoyogic practices as a part of religious sadhna. However, the followers of these sects, in fact, seem to have stretched their antinomian protest to its utmost limit and held that the most meritorious acts are such natural ones as eating and drinking which sustain life, sexual intercourse which propagates it, and the natural functions which give it ease. In actual practice, it really amounted to a total surrender to carnal appetites. As a result of this, these cults went into disrepute and the original concept of 'sahaj' became besmirched with questionable ethical connotations. Its reintroduction into the Indian mystic lore by the preceptors of the Sikh faith signified a new turn in the history of this term, for they invested it with a new breadth of meaning and mystical import coupled with sublime ethical and aesthetic connotations that conduced to the elevation of the soul.

The Sikh concept of sahaj shared with that of the sects mentioned (a) rejection of external formalities, (b) rejection of priestly authority, and in a positive way, (c) recognition of the guru as essential for spiritual growth and advancement, and (d) recognition of the Ultimate Reality as an experience of unruffled equipoise and ineffable bliss. However, it differed from them not only in its rejection at once of sexoyogic practices (of Sahajayanis) as well as in the derogation of women (of Nathapanthis), but even in the breadth of conceptualization. For the Gurus, man's original nature was of the nature of light or intuitive knowledge "man tun joti sarupu hai apana mulu pachhanu" (GG, 441). A reattainment of this natural self, with its attendant peace and equipoise is sahaj. In this state, life is unaffected by any artificiality or put-up appearances for they are but the defences of the empirical ego (haumai) and that, in sahaj, is conquered. Then with a basic dispositional spontaneity, love goodness and

compassion blossom forth from the being. This widened concept of sahaj signifies a transcendent state—one beyond the ordinary modes of being (gunas), beyond the habitual levels of consciousness and beyond the illusion of duality or maya.

To appreciate fully the breadth of meaning of the Sikh concept of sahaj, it may be looked at from various aspects. In its cognitive aspect, it can be seen as a state of illumination, one of heightened consciousness, mystical awareness (sahaj rahas) or intuitive knowledge. In this state the duality of subject and object (which results from a process of individuation and ego-formation) vanishes: Since all feelings of duality basically develop around the subject-object dichotomy, with the dissolution of the latter, these disappear, distances vanish and reality comes to be perceived with the impact of immediacy. In its cognitive aspect, sahaj is a state of freedom wherein everything happens with natural ease (sahaj subhai). Spontaneity is the ground of every kind of behaviour—vegetative, emotive and moral. On the emotive or aesthetic planes, it signifies the discovery of the great harmony within as well as without. In sahaj, as it were, an inner door (dasam dvar) of aesthetic perception opens up and one directly perceives the rhythmicity of one's being weave an 'unstruck melody' (anhat nad) which is accompanied by a pervading feeling of unconditioned bliss (sahaj anand).

A deeper significance of existence seems to emerge in sahaj. When one becomes oriented to it, emotional turbulence ceases. Pleasures and pains pass like ripples over the surface while the mighty deep underneath remains unruffled. Then, it appears, one dons pleasures and pains just as one changes one's garments "sukhu dukhu dui dari kapare pahirahi jai manukh" (GG, 149). This is how sahaj epitomizes mental equipoise in which all turbulence of emotions is calmed. While the egocentrics abide in doubt and carry anxieties in their heart which permit them to sleep, the wise wake and sleep in sahaj— "manmukhi bharamai sahasa hovai antari chinta nid na sovai giani jagahi savahi subhai nanak nami ratia bali jau" (GG, 646). Peace being the hallmark of this state, all running about and all feverish pursuits cease. Wandering itself is worn out for now a new dignity in life is found.

Sahaj has been called a state of freedom. It betokens freedom from desire (trsna), from conflict (dvandva) and from illusion (maya). One is liberated from the cramping influence of social compulsions, yet one does not become a fugitive from social responsibility. On the contrary, since one is also cured simultaneously of the equally cramping compulsion of egoism, one no longer lives for oneself. One lives more for others. In sahaj one is also liberated from the servility of carnal needs. In this state neither drowsiness, nor hunger remains; and one ever abides in the Divine Bliss of Hari Nam (God's Name). Pleasure and sorrow occur not where the all-pervading self shineth forth—"gurmukhi antari sahaju hai manu charia dasavai akasi tithai ungh na bhukh hai hari amrit namu sukh vasu nanak dukhu sukh viapat nahijithai atam ram pragasu" (GG, 1414).

Sahaj also spells an awareness of the great vital harmony (sahajdhuni) within as one gets attuned to the inner rhythm of Being. One also simultaneously discovers self-same harmony and mystical rhythmicity pervading the entire gamut of the mighty cosmos. The intensity of this experience is a great aesthetic wonderment. It is a creative joy of the highest order—sheer 'joy' in contradistinction to 'enjoyment' of the sense objects. It is; therefore, not ephemeral like the latter, but is an abiding state of undiminishing bliss. Although illumination, spontaneity, freedom, equipoise, and harmony may be described as the chief characteristics of sahaj, there are several other subtle characteristics of this state alluded to at several places in the Guru Granth Sahib as, for example, in the following passage:

One who abideth in sahaj
Looketh alike on friend and foe.
What he heareth is essence true;
And in his seeing is meditation.
He sleepeth in calm, he riseth in peace
From 'being' to 'becoming' with natural ease.
Sad or glad, he abideth in sahaj;
Effortless his silence; spontaneous his utterance.
In poise he eateth, in poise he loveth.
In sahaj he findeth distances bridged.

(GG, 236)

It is thus the supremest spiritual state. How can, then, this state be attained? Actions, however meritorious, do not bring it about. In fact, sahaj does not sprout so long as one abideth in maya—"maia vichi sahaju na upajai maia dujai bhai" (GG, 68). To become detached from the world of maia (maya), one does not need actions, but gian (jnana), which comes from the grace of the Guru. Says Guru Amar Das: "O brother! there can be no sahaj without the Guru's benevolence. Sahaj sprouts from the Word, whereby one meets the Lord—the true One—"bhai re gur binu sahaju na hoi. . . ." (GG, 68). From the true Word emanates the sahajdhuni (the tune of sahaj) and the mind gets absorbed in Truth—"sachai sabadi sahaj dhuni upajai mani sachai liv lai" (GG, l 234). And then the very music of sahaj that is being played at His door, also becomes the brandmark of the seeker—"tere duarai dhuni sahaj ki mathai mere dagai" (GG, 970).

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